

Message Text

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EXDIS

FOR ASSISTANT SECRETARY HOLBROOKE FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: US, JA, VM
SUBJECT: VIETNAM: A POSSIBLE OPPORTUNITY FOR STRENGTHENING
U.S.-JAPANESE RELATIONS

1. IN THE WAKE OF VICE MINISTER HIEN'S VISIT, BUT MORE PARTICULARLY IN THE LIGHT OF FOREIGN MINISTER SONODA'S COMMENTS ABOUT IT AND MIYAKE'S SUBSEQUENT REMARKS TO BILL SHERMAN, A NUMBER OF THOUGHTS HAVE BEEN RUNNING THROUGH MY MIND, WHICH I WOULD LIKE TO SHARE WITH YOU.

2. AS YOU WELL KNOW, THE JAPANESE HAVE LONG HAD A CERTAIN FASCINATION ABOUT INDOCHINA. LONG BEFORE WORLD WAR II, AT A TIME WHEN JAPAN WAS POSING AS THE CHAMPION OF ASIAN NATIONALISM, CUONG DE SOUGHT REFUGE IN JAPAN WHEN HIS NATIONALIST UNDERTAKINGS MET WITH FRENCH DISFAVOR. VARIOUS POINTS OF VIEW WILL HAVE IT THAT THE WAR IN THE PACIFIC STARTED WITH THE MANCHURIAN INCIDENT OR THE MARCO POLO BRIDGE INCIDENT OR WITH PEARL HARBOR. BUT A PRETTY GOOD CASE CAN BE MADE THAT THE POINT OF NO RETURN WAS PASSED WHEN OUR WARNINGS WERE IGNORED AND THE JAPANESE MOVED INTO THEN FRENCH INDOCHINA.

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3. TODAY, ONCE AGAIN, ONE CAN PERCEIVE SIGNS OF JAPANESE INTEREST IN INFLUENCING DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA, THIS TIME NOT IN ORDER TO ADVANCE JAPANESE MACHTPOLITIK (GREATER EAST ASIA), BUT IN ORDER TO STABILIZE THE SITUATION IN THE AREA. WHILE THERE IS MUCH TALK ABOUT JAPAN'S ASEAN INITIATIVE, WHICH IS CERTAINLY LAUDATORY AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH U.S. POLICY, I HAVE A HUNCH A POSITIVE ROLE

IN AFFECTING THE COURSE VIETNAM EVENTUALLY TAKES IS AT LEAST AS INTRIGUING IN JAPANESE EYES. LIKE THE U.S., THEY WOULD ULTIMATELY LIKE TO SEE A VIETNAM DOMINATED BY NEITHER THE PRC OR THE USSR, ULTIMATELY DRAWN INTO ASSOCIATION WITH ASEAN. THIS DESIGN IS ONLY NOW TAKING SHAPE IN JAPANESE THINKING -- WHERE CAMBODIA AND LAOS MIGHT FIT IN IS NOT CLEAR, BUT I IMAGINE JAPAN WILL REGARD THIS AS A SECONDARY QUESTION.

4. IN THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, WITHOUT ATTEMPTING TO STEER OUR VIETNAM POLICY OR PASS JUDGMENT ON THE PACE AT WHICH WE SHOULD MOVE, I WOULD ONLY SUGGEST THERE MAY BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR POSITIVE COOPERATION WITH JAPAN THAT WE SHOULD NOT MISS. WE SHOULD NOT WAIT UNTIL WE HAVE MADE ANY PARTICULAR MOVE OR TAKEN A DEFINITE ACTION WITH REGARD TO VIETNAM, BUT SHOULD KEEP UP A RUNNING DIALOGUE WITH OUR JAPANESE PARTNERS, ENCOURAGE THEM IN THEIR THINKING IF IT MAKES SENSE TO US -- AS IT SEEMS TO ME TO DO -- AND SHARE SOME OF OUR OWN IDEAS. NOT ONLY WOULD SUCH AN APPROACH IN REGARD TO ONE OF THE FEW REGIONS IN WHICH JAPAN SEEMS INCLINED TO STEP OUT ON ITS OWN SERVE TO CEMENT OUR POLITICAL/SECURITY RELATIONSHIP, AGAINST WHICH WE MUST CONTEND WITH LESS TRACTABLE ECONOMIC ISSUES, BUT IT SHOULD APPEAL PERSONALLY TO FUKUDA AND SONODA WITH INTANGIBLE ADVANTAGES FOR THE WHOLE GAMUT OF BILATERAL AND MULTILATERAL ISSUES ON OUR CURRENT AGENDA. WE WOULD OF COURSE NOT WANT TO GIVE THE
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APPEARANCE OF A COLLUSIVE US-JAPAN APPROACH TO INDOCHINA ANYMORE THAN WE WISH TO IN REGARD TO ASEAN, BUT WITH A LITTLE BIT OF CARE THIS SHOULD BE AVOIDABLE.

5. IN THIS CONNECTION SONODA'S PERSONAL ROLE IS ANOTHER FACTOR TO CONSIDER. MORE AND MORE SONODA IS EMERGING AS THE KEY PLAYER ON THE JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY-MAKING SIDE, AND HE IS PERSONALLY ENGAGED IN THE FORMATION AND EXECUTION OF JAPANESE DIPLOMACY TOWARD INDOCHINA. IMPRESSIVE FROM THE START, HE HAS GROWN IN THE JOB. IN HIS MEETINGS WITH BRZEZINSKI AND DEPUTY SECRETARY DUNCAN HE EXHIBITED CONFIDENCE, MASTERY OF HIS SUBJECT MATTER, AND A FAIR AMOUNT OF INNOVATIVE THINKING. WHETHER OR NOT HE WILL REMAIN AS FOREIGN MINISTER AFTER FUKUDA LEAVES THE SCENE, HE IS LIKELY TO BE A MAJOR GOVERNMENT FIGURE FOR SOME TIME TO COME -- I WOULD NOT DISCOUNT THE POSSIBILITY OF HIS BECOMING PRIME MINISTER. CLOSE CONSULTATION, AND TO THE EXTENT POSSIBLE POLICY COORDINATION, WITH JAPAN ON AN ISSUE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST TO SONODA MIGHT NOT ONLY BEAR FRUIT IN INDOCHINA, BUT COULD PAY DIVIDENDS IN TERMS OF THE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE SONODA PLACES IN US.

6. ADMITTEDLY I HAVE SET DOWN ONLY THE SKETCHY ESSENCE OF
SOME PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS, BUT I WOULD WELCOME YOUR REAC-
TION AND THOSE OF OTHERS IN THE DEPARTMENT AND WHITE HOUSE.
MANSFIELD

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